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Cornhill St. Wm

THE GREAT EXHIBITION,

HERE AND HEREAFTER.

THE Great Exhibition ! The words are in everybody's mouth ; from the Court to the cottage it is the all-engrossing theme, and the most eager anticipations are indulged in. Natives of almost every country of the civilized world are daily flocking to our shores ; foreigners meet us at every turn ; on every side the sounds of a language not our own fall upon the ear. What an opportunity it will afford us, says one, of improving our manufactures ! By letting foreigners into our secrets, it will injure our own trade ! says another ; and thus parties, viewing it only in the light of a commercial enterprise, differ as to the effect it may produce upon the country ; forgetting the while, that an event so important as the gathering together of the representatives of many nations in the metropolis of Christian England, can neither have been planned nor carried out irrespective of the will of Him, without whom not "a sparrow falleth ;" and that

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according as His blessing on the undertaking is given or withheld, so will it be beneficial or otherwise to the country that originates it.

But there are other points of view in which this "Great Exhibition" may be expected to operate for good or for evil, in proportion as the opportunities it will open to us of benefiting ourselves and others are improved or abused; and, therefore, reader, it is that we wish to stir up ourselves and you to remember that we shall each, as members of one large community—of one Christian Church, have our respective duties to perform, since it is only by a faithful discharge of those duties that we can expect to call down upon us that Divine blessing which is essential alike to our national and individual prosperity.

And, first, it surely behoves us as the Christian subjects of a Christian Queen to be prepared to stand forth, each in our several spheres, as witnesses to the truth of our national faith, and the sincerity of our national worship. The more clearly to illustrate this, let us turn for a moment to those Scriptures which are given "by inspiration of God, and are profitable for our instruction in righteousness:" there we find an event recorded which to the serious and reflective mind may be placed in instructive contrast to the great national movement which is now occupying so large a share of public attention.

In ages long since past another mighty monarch issued a decree summoning "all people, nations, and languages" to repair at a certain time to a certain place.

The act, how similar—the object, how different from those of England's Sovereign! as different as Christianity and Heathenism might be expected to render them! The enlightened Christian monarch, though raised to the highest pinnacle of earthly greatness, acknowledges her own allegiance to the King of kings, and desires to glorify Him while promoting the interests of her people: but the object of the benighted Heathen was to exalt himself above the Lord Jehovah, for he ordered that at a given signal all “should fall down and worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up;” and lest any should be found daring enough to disobey, the most terrible punishment was denounced against such an offender.

The idolatrous subjects of an idolatrous monarch were, however, but too ready to conciliate his favour by prostrating themselves before the image; yet even in Babylon, the stronghold of heathenism, the Lord had not left himself without a witness; a remnant who “bowed not the knee unto Baal.”

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three young Jews, who, though captives, had become the subjects of Nebuchadnezzar by having accepted offices of trust in his provinces, is well known; how they refused to bow down to a graven image, or worship any other god than the God of Israel; how they were thereupon cast into a burning fiery furnace, and how one “like the Son of God” himself appeared walking with them in the flame, to shield them from danger and to strike terror and conviction to the heart of their persecuting foe. Let this brief outline of the

history suffice ; to us, as more to our purpose, belongs the application : namely, the effect which the consistent conduct and strong faith of these young men, followed as it was by a miracle so stupendous, must have had on the minds of the vast multitude who witnessed it.

They saw them, equally undazzled by the regal splendour and undaunted by the threatening frown of their powerful master, fall bound into the heated furnace, rather than seem to forsake their God by yielding to another the worship which is due to Him alone : that Heathen assemblage had before heard of Israel's God by the hearing of the ear, but now they beheld with their own eyes a most surprising display of His love and power : of His love to those who honoured Him ; of His power, as manifested in the salvation of his friends and the destruction of his enemies. May we not then suppose them ready to exclaim, as with one voice, "The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God ! The Lord shall reign for ever and ever !" And, hardened as they had hitherto been in their idolatry, may we not hope that some among them returned to their distant homes prepared to cast "their idols to the moles and to the bats," and to act upon Joshua's pious resolve, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

Thus was the assembling together of many "people, nations, and languages," on the plain of Dura, for the express purpose of dishonouring God, overruled to the promotion of His glory and the salvation, it may

be, of many souls ; and these three humble individuals, little accounted of as they might have been by the princes, governors, and other great men who thronged the court of Nebuchadnezzar, were permitted to become the instruments of spreading abroad the knowledge of Him "whom to know is life eternal."

Now, is it too much to hope, that, with the Divine blessing poured out upon the forthcoming assemblage of the "people, nations, and languages" of the world, similar happy results may be produced, and in some cases, perhaps, by means as little expected ?

Praised be God, however, we live neither in an age or country, where we are required so to vindicate our faith !

It is not, as we have said, for any unhallowed purpose that the "Great Exhibition of 1851" has been proclaimed. The Queen of England, one of whose titles, and the most honourable of all, is "Defender of the Faith," issues—not a decree, for she is no harsh despot—but a gracious invitation, literally addressed to all "people, nations, and languages," calling upon them to repair, by their representatives, to the chief city of her empire, not for the purpose of yielding her base and servile homage, or of being impressed with high notions of her power ; but with a view to benefit the world at large, by promoting the cultivation of all useful and elegant arts, and to encourage that spirit of enterprise by which man may turn to a worthy account the superior gift of intellect with which the Lord has seen fit to endow him. To provide bread for the hungry, and employ-

ment for the deserving ; to stimulate the idle to work, and the ignorant to learn, to encourage all to be industrious and self-dependent, and, though last not least, to bind the great human family together by the best and strongest bond of brotherhood, that of universal love, are some of the valuable objects proposed to be effected by this National Exhibition. And are not these objects on which we may fearlessly ask the Almighty Ruler of the universe to look down with approval? Let us, then, seek His blessing on the undertaking, and let us be careful at the same time that we do not, by our actions, tempt Him to withdraw His loving-kindness from us: that we do not virtually deny Him whom we profess to serve.

Unlike the visitors to Babylon, those strangers who come amongst us will, for the most part, be worshippers of the one only and true God ; and though here and there a follower of Mahomet, or a disciple of Brahma, may mingle with the crowd, the majority will also profess the faith of Christ crucified,—will in words, if not in deed, acknowledge that Jesus Christ came down from heaven to save sinners, and that the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier, prepares the hearts of believers to “receive Him by faith, unto salvation.”

But while these great leading truths of Christianity will have been vitally received by some, and only formally acknowledged by others of our guests, we, as a nation occupying no mean place in the religious annals of the world, need entertain no doubt as to what is required of us. “Freely ye have received, freely give,” is an injunction that may apply no less to

spiritual privileges than to temporal possessions, and herein Englishmen are debtors to a large amount. To prove, then, that we “hold not the faith in unrighteousness,”—that we are a GOD-FEARING, as well as a TRUTH-PROFESSING, people—that the Bible which we read we also obey;—that the Sabbath which we nationally set apart we individually honour, are duties that belong to all, whatever be our age, sex, or station;—may we each have grace given us to perform the same! Either nationally or individually we cannot serve two masters. Choose we then this day whom we will serve; and let us not be backward in proclaiming our choice to the world.

Let the foreigner see that our churches are full and our theatres empty—that the Sabbath is, indeed, with us a holy day; that the voice of the blasphemer is not heard nor the haggard face of the drunkard seen in our streets. Let us show him that we are fair and honest in our dealings—that we worship not the “golden image” when it issues from the mint, and repudiate it only when “the goldsmith maketh it a god.” In our churches and chapels let him hear the Gospel faithfully proclaimed; let there be no detraction from the merit of Christ’s atoning sacrifice by attempting to share between Him and our own good works the honour of man’s redemption; nor allow it, on the other hand, to be supposed that strength of faith is by any held an excuse for laxity of practice. Let the decorous behaviour and devout bearing of our congregations convince him that with one heart, as with one voice, we glorify God.

If he attends our religious assemblies, give him not room to imagine that though zeal be ours, "the more excellent gift of charity" is withheld, nor let him hear vituperation usurping the place of argument. Let us prove to him that our loyalty is a part of our religion, and that not only the office, but the person of our Sovereign is dear to her subjects. Let him see us cheerfully rendering "tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour is due."

If he enters our schools let him find there the young being trained for eternity; suffer him not to suppose that the poor of our land are uncared for while the rich revel in luxury. Let him see virtue honoured amongst us, though it be clothed in rags, and vice discountenanced even when clad in "purple and fine linen."

But our foreign guest will not only observe us in public; he will enter our houses and mingle in our family circles; he will see us not only such as we wish to appear, but such as we really are—be it ours to take care that he sees us such as Christians should be.

Let husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, be found dwelling together in unity—let communities be living at peace with each other, "none striving for the mastery, but each esteeming other better than themselves." Let him find a family altar in every house, a Bible in every cottage: show him parents desiring for their children the "true riches" in preference to those which "take

to themselves wings and fly away." Let him find old age honoured, youth judiciously restrained, and infancy taught to lisp forth its first accents in thankfulness to God. Constrain him, in short, to acknowledge that whatever may be the religious and moral condition of the land from which he comes, highly-favoured England lags not behind in the course of dutiful obedience to their common Lord.

But are we prepared thus to vindicate our national character as Christians? The time is at hand; it behoves us, therefore, seriously to make the inquiry, What would be the report of the stranger who now dwells amongst us? Does he never see the Sabbath broken or the sanctuary profaned? Does he find no dissension in our families, no immorality in our streets? Has he reason to believe that fraud and injustice, cruelty and oppression, malice and revenge, slander and detraction, are vices unknown to Englishmen? Alas! for our country, when questions such as these are to be answered. Instead of her standing acquitted, might not the long list of her iniquities be added to until the pious beholder is fain to cry out with David of old, "The overflowings of ungodliness made me afraid"?

And if such be really the moral state of England, as a nation, let us not endeavour to comfort ourselves with the thought that we, as individuals, are in no wise accountable for the sins of the multitude. National mercies, if not diffused among the various members of the community, cease to be such. Our prolific harvests, our just laws, our free Constitution,

are blessings of which all partake; and have we not all some share in producing national sins? It may truly be said that one sinner makes many; the ungodly father sends forth into the world irreligious sons; the idle or profligate mother can seldom boast of having useful and virtuous daughters. If we indulge in pride and passion can we expect our children to be humble and meek? and if we are ourselves the slaves of intemperance, with what show of justice can we reprove our dependents for having failed in sobriety? and even if our consciences acquit us of such flagrant sins as these, shall we not, if we look deeply into our own hearts, too surely find selfishness and discontent, envy and hatred, malice and uncharitableness, lurking there and shedding their baneful influence around us?

Universal, then, as is the fall from virtue, so universal must the reformation be, and what season more favourable than the present for its commencement? "Behold," says the wise legislator of Israel, "I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me; keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Oh, that highly-favoured England, unlike Israel of old, would lay these words to heart!

Not by our own unassisted efforts, however, can any of us put away our sins and turn unto the Lord our God. If we have no better support than the

broken reed of our own self-sufficiency, our best resolutions will soon give way beneath the power of daily and hourly-recurring temptations—temptations, too, which so large and promiscuous an influx of visitors to our metropolis can scarcely fail to increase. “It is God alone which worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure:” to Him, therefore, let us individually, as well as nationally, look for help, fearing not but we shall receive it; for as He is essentially good in His own nature, so is He infinitely liberal in the communication of His goodness: “Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way.” “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye!” Precious promises! weak and ignorant as we are, shall we not accept the support and instruction they offer us?

But if thus to prove the sincerity of our religious profession by the consistency of our daily practice is a duty which we owe to our God, there is yet another, due to our neighbour, which, if we desire to act up to our Saviour’s golden rule, we shall be equally anxious to perform each according to the ability given him.

In the enlarged intercourse between man and man, which the Great Exhibition may be expected to produce, we shall, doubtless, meet with many who, while calling themselves Christians, are wandering far from the way of salvation; some, perhaps, who are trusting in an arm of flesh and thinking to save themselves by their own righteousness; others who are so immersed in the business and pleasures of the world as

to be careless and indifferent with regard to a future state; and, worse still, some who equally question Saviour's power to redeem or punish the sinner. And shall we see our fellow-creature upon the brink of a precipice, about to fall into an unfathomable gulph, and not stretch out a hand, however weak, to save him? Shall an unbelieving dread of our own insufficiency hold us back when the safety of an immortal soul is at stake? "God hath chosen," be it remembered, "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are."

Armed then with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," let us boldly enter the lists against man's spiritual enemy, assured that he can never stand beneath the strokes of that most powerful weapon. With our finger on the words, "There is no other name under heaven given amongst men, whereby we must be saved," let us lift up our voices, and with meekness and Christian charity proclaim the fact, that "he that believeth is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."

These are simple truths, which all may teach who have received them into their own hearts; but simple as they are, they are mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan.

And who that rightly estimates the worth of a soul, but will regard it as the greatest of all honours, to be made instrumental in arousing even one sinner to a sense of his danger? David, in the plenitude of his power, rejoiced that he had not "refrained his lips from preaching righteousness in the great congregation;" and Paul desired nothing so much, as that "utterance might be given unto him, that he might open his mouth to make known the mystery of the Gospel," of that Gospel which is the "good tidings of great joy to all people."

But if we sometimes feel ourselves called upon to be teachers, we must be learners too. Many of the excellent of the earth will be drawn hither by this Exhibition, men well qualified to instruct others in the way of holiness; with some such, it may be the good fortune of most of us to come in contact, and then it will become us to be more forward to hear than to speak; and if, in some cases, we are compelled to differ from our visitors on points of doctrine, let no unchristian prejudice blind our eyes to whatever is really good in them; if we see them more outwardly devout than ourselves, more earnest, more eager to make others think as they think, and act as they act, let us not be too ready to ascribe it to unworthy motives, but let it rather stir us up to greater watchfulness, and to more earnest zeal.

There is yet another thought for the serious mind to dwell on, which this Exhibition is calculated to suggest. A few quickly fleeting months, and it will be over; the manufacturer will have made known the

results of his skill and industry ; the spectator will have gazed with delight on the combined wonders of nature and art ; those whom disinclination, or want of means to travel, have confined to their own country, will have had an opportunity of seeing, at little cost of time or money, the products of other lands ; all will have been gratified, very many, it is to be hoped, benefited. But these ends answered, and the exhibitors, the visitors, and it is said, the very building itself, will disappear from the scene. The Englishman will retire to his home, the foreigner will return to his own country, and those who have been mingling day after day in the same busy throng, will thus be dispersed, north, south, east, and west, to meet no more in this world.

But, Reader ! though this undertaking from which we naturally hope so much is justly styled the “ *Great Exhibition*,” we shall do well to remember that it is neither the GREATEST nor the LAST. Once again ; in the fulness of time, there will be an assembling together of “all the people, nations, and languages” of the earth,—but they will be summoned neither to do homage to an earthly king—for earthly kings will then have ceased to reign—nor to benefit each other as regards the things of time, for time itself will be no more,—but to receive their doom for eternity ! for then “shall the Son of man come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other,—And before Him shall be gathered all nations.” Surely that will be the greatest

Exhibition, when sins now concealed from every human eye shall be made known, and all men shall appear as they really are.

My friends, are we looking for this summons? are we prepared to meet our God?—to stand in the presence of Him who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart? Are we walking along the strait and narrow road that leads to heaven; or are we so absorbed in the pursuit of the honours, profits, and approbation of the world, as to have no leisure to “press forward to the mark of the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus?” Again, we may say the time is at hand, and we shall do well, each of us, without delay to ask these questions of our own heart, for they are questions on which our everlasting happiness depends. No sooner were the wishes of Queen Victoria made known, than the key-note of preparation sounded through the length and breadth of the land; and shall we, who are so heedful of the summons of our Queen, be regardless of the still more gracious invitation of our God? Hear it then now! “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” It is no hard matter that is required of us; look only to Him who is *waiting* to be gracious. Look away from earth, with its business and pleasures, its cares and temptations,—away from man with his doctrines and discipline, his doubts and contradictions; away from self, with its weakness and infirmities, its blindness and ignorance, and look unto Jesus, who “is the end of the law for righteousness to all that believe.”

So shall we be prepared to meet Him, when he comes to judgment; so shall we have no cause to tremble, when "the dead small and great stand before God, and the books are opened; when the sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and death and hell shall give up the dead that are in them, and they shall be judged every man according to his work!" For though our sins will rise up before us, more than the sands on the sea-shore in multitude, and of the deepest scarlet in dye, the robe of Christ's righteousness will cover them all, in the fountain of his blood they will be washed white as snow.

May England, then, so highly favoured in her civil and religious liberty, so blessed with peace and prosperity, so rich in Gospel privileges, take the lead in spiritual, as she has so often done in temporal improvements; and may the year 1851 be distinguished in her annals, not only as the era of her "Great Exhibition," but as the epoch from which an extensive revival of real, vital religion amongst her sons and daughters may date its commencement!